

We Energies Peregrine Falcon Nesting Season Report April 21, 2009

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Pleasant Prairie Power Plant A Complete Turnover of Adults

After the loss of "Duke" (b/r) 1/*P last December, his mate "Breezer" (b/r) *R/*2 stayed the course and by Jan. 14 had attracted a new adult male who Bob Reske and I have since identified as "Dave" (b/g) P/36. Dave was produced in 2006 at We Energies Port Washington Generating Station. Webcam images during January showed the pair in courtship display inside the nest box and I thought we would be back on track for another successful nesting season here.



Breezer at her nest box on May 5 last year -- likely the last photo taken of her. Between 1999-2008, Breezer produced 32 young at the Pleasant Prairie Power Plant.

Images of Dave and his bands taken through peep-holes in the nest box.



Then, sometime in February, Breezer disappeared. It is not known what happened, but it is unlikely she was displaced by another falcon as Dave was seen perched alone in the nest box for more than two weeks afterward.

It was not until March 3 that a new female was observed. She is banded black/green but has not been identified yet. Dave and his new mate have been seen regularly in the nest box, and an egg was laid on April 13. Typically, eggs are laid about every other day but so far, only one egg exists, and it does not appear any more are on the way.

Strangely, this new female has spent little time at the nest box since she laid her egg, which in a normal situation would not be expected. In the past two days, she has not been seen at all. Webcam images of her from last week also showed a falcon that appeared drowsy. This could be a common condition called egg lethargy, which females exhibit during egg laying or she could be egg bound which would be more serious. Another possible explanation is one that came to mind last week when I received the necropsy report on Duke, which indicated that avian trichomoniasis was suspected as a possible root cause of his demise. Avian trichomoniasis is caused by a single celled protozoan (*Trichomoniasis gallinae*). Avirulent and highly virulent strains of this parasite are found in nature and circulate within bird populations. It has been reported that 80-90% of adult pigeons are infected with avian trichomoniasis but show no clinical signs of the disease (Field manual of wildlife diseases: birds, pp. 201-206).

With pigeons being a regular food source for peregrines, consuming an infected pigeon may have been the cause of Duke's death and possibly Breezer's death as well and similarly could be affecting the new female at this site. At this point, there is no way of knowing for sure whether avian trichomoniasis is present, and nothing can be done to prevent it. Nevertheless, it would be interesting to learn what is happening here. In a study I did between 2001-2003, I tested a total of 146 peregrines for the presence of avian trichomoniasis. Overall, 12% (18 of 146) tested positive. What was most interesting was that in 2002, the percentage of positive results was 28% (12 of 43). This was four to five times higher than 7% (3 of 43) in 2001 and 5% (3 of 60) in 2003. A possible explanation for this spike in 2002 was that regional winter temperature averages that year were approximately 10 degrees warmer than in 2001 and 2003, which may have had some effect on the prevalence of avian trichomoniasis in local pigeon populations.

Oak Creek Power Plant

Peregrine Falcons Incubating 4 Eggs

Webcam images from this site showed the peregrines in their nest box in early March. On a visit to the nest box on April 10, I was able to identify the adults once again as Atlanta and Scott.

Adult Female: Atlanta (b/r) L/*C was wpr in 1996 at the WPS Pulliam Power Plant site in Green Bay, WI. This is Atlanta's 11th year at this site.

Adult Male: "Scott" (b/g) M/Y, here for his 4th year was wpr in 2000 at the Malteurop Malting complex (formerly *Froedtert Malt*) in West Milwaukee, WI.



Atlanta at her nest box on April 10, 2009.

Eggs: 4 laid between April 7–24
Projected Hatch Dates: May 15–17

Oak Creek Great Horned Owl Update

All three owlets fledged from this site between April 6-14. After the first owlet fledged, it spent a day or two near (and under) a contractor's trailer and was subsequently seen to have flown off into a nearby wooded area. The second owlet to fledge was found grounded and returned to the nest box April 10. Unfortunately, on its second attempt at fledging, it was killed by one of the resident peregrines. Owlet number three fledged on April 14 and has not been seen, so we are hopeful no news is good news.



Last year, the peregrines at this site nested later than usual, likely in response to the owls taking over their original nest box and then having to adapt to the new nest box provided for them. As a consequence, when the owlets fledged last year, the peregrines had not yet laid eggs and as far as we know, there were no adverse interactions between the falcons and young owlets. This year however, the falcons were already in their new nest box and in the midst of egg-laying when the owlets fledged, so this may be part of the reason one of the owlets was attacked and killed.

All raptors are protective of their nest sites, and many will pursue and/or attack any perceived intruder. Unfortunately, the owlet that was killed here was at the wrong place at the wrong time, and the peregrines perceived it as a threat to their nest. During my years working with peregrines, I have seen some very protective (and impressive) behavior at their nest sites. I have watched peregrines attack and knock red-tailed hawks out of the air, and in one instance, I watched the adult peregrines at Milwaukee's US Bank nest site work together to attack and knock a turkey vulture out of the air.

Likewise, peregrines will do battle with other peregrines at nest sites when they show up during the nesting season. Most of these intruders are driven off, but in some cases, battles ensue that cause injuries and, in some cases, the death of one of the falcons.

Nesting is serious business, and attacks by peregrines are not limited only to other raptors. While visiting nest sites and banding young peregrines over the past 20+ years, I've had a number of close calls and been struck twice. The peregrines, like all good parents, were just trying to protect their young, and this is to be admired.

Milwaukee Valley Power Plant

5 Eggs!

After an unsuccessful nesting attempt at this site again last season, we were encouraged when webcam images in early March began showing both a male and female peregrine at the nest box.

Activity continued throughout the month and the first of five eggs was laid on March 28.

On April 8, I made an attempt to identify the adult male here who spends a lot of his time incubating. Early that morning, Brian Henschel and I stopped at the nest box and took a look through one of the peep-holes and as expected, the male was incubating. When he stood up, I finally had a clear look at his bands at a distance of only 18 inches. Unfortunately, the bands were covered in prey remains and dirt and totally unreadable! I will try again. Maybe after the recent rains, the bands will be washed clean and readable.

Adult Female: Unknown

Adult Male: Unknown, banded b/g

Eggs: 5 laid between March 28–April 8

Projected Hatch Dates: May 5–9



A bonus clutch of 5 eggs – a first for this site.

Port Washington Generating Station

Peregrines began frequenting the nest box at this site in late February, and the first egg was laid on April 1.

Adult Female: "Icon" " (b/g) 50/D, produced in 2004 at the LTV Steel site in Cleveland, OH. This is her 4th year at this site.

Adult Male: Unknown, banded b/g 7?/?

Eggs: 4 laid between April 1-9
Projected Hatch Dates: May 10-12



Icon's clutch of 4 eggs.



Icon perched on a chimney railing above her nest box.

Presque Isle Power Plant, MI

Webcam images from this site have provided little hope for this spring. Last year, a peregrine was spotted at the nest box in March, but there have been no confirmed sightings since.

Milwaukee County Power Plant

So far, there has been no confirmed activity at this site, although Bill Holton reports that someone may have seen a falcon at the plant earlier this spring. Peregrines have been seen at the Mayfair Mall, which is just north of here, so there is still hope we may see some activity here.

On March 26, Pete Dickinson and I cleaned the webcam and all-weather housing here where spiders had taken up residence.

We Energies Peregrines Making a Difference

Another We Energies Produced Peregrine Found in Wisconsin

Ten years ago, at the Madison Gas & Electric plant in Madison, Executive Director of Energy Production Steve Schultz and his son built and installed a peregrine nest box at this site. In mid-March this year, Caleb Pourchot of Madison spotted two peregrines at the plant. According to Tim Ellestad who has spent a lot of time watching with his spotting scope during the past few weeks, a number of different falcons have visited the site.

As of this week, there are two banded adult peregrines here, and it appears they may be nesting. I will be visiting the site to inspect the nest box soon, but in the meanwhile, Tim Ellestad was able to read the bands on the male here, and he is none other than **“Verne” (b/g) E/42** who was produced at We Energies Port Washington Generating Station in 2007. I banded Verne along with his sibling, **“Shirley” (b/g) N/36** on May 31 that year.

For additional information on the Peregrine Falcon Recovery Program, contact:
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